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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

By W. B. BRYAN.

(Read before the Society, April 11, 1904.)

The rise of the Presbyterian Church in the District of Columbia has a wider interest and significance than attaches to that which is merely local. For in this general section of the country the beginnings of the denomination in the United States have been traced. Here was the scene of the labors of the men who have been justly termed the fathers of the church. A few miles down the Potomac River in Charles Co., Md., opposite Acquia Creek on the Virginia shore were spent, beginning about the year 1657, the late and fruitful years of Francis Doughty, the intrepid missionary and preacher who has been described as the apostle of Presbyterianism in America. There, too, his successor, Matthew Hill, labored and farther to the south in Somerset Co. on the eastern shore of Maryland Francis Makemie, in the closing years of the seventeenth century, laid the foundations of several Presbyterian churches. Along the Patuxent only a few miles from the borders of the District and at Marlboro', the county seat of Prince George Co., of which the territory included within the original limits of the City of Washington was a part, lived Ninian Beall.

As an elder of the Presbyterian Church he proved to be a worthy successor of William Durand and Richard Bennet, the elders of the Nansemond Church, Upper

Norfolk Co., Va., who guided that colony from Virginia and settled near the Severn River in what was afterwards named Anne Arundel Co. The date of the migration of this Puritan colony from Virginia was 1649.* It is not known certainly whether their form of church government was that of the Independents or Presbyterians. Still it may be inferred from the increasing importance of the Presbyterian Church in this section, that they formed a nucleus which was added to by subsequent migrations from England, Scotland and Ireland of adherents of the Presbyterian Church who sought freedom from sectarian and political agitation which was so general in those countries during the seventeenth century.

In another particular is this center of Presbyterian influence in the last half of the seventeenth century and the opening years of the eighteenth century connected with this District. For there was the home of Ninian Beall, of whom it is said by a recent historian of the Presbyterian Church that he was the nucleus of Presbyterianism in Maryland during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.† Shortly after the opening of the eighteenth century Ninian Beall acquired by patent a large tract of land, known as the Rock of Dumbarton, and when in later years the town of Georgetown was established a portion of this grant was included within the site selected. At that time the property was owned by George Beall, who inherited it from his father, Ninian Beall, and the claim has been made that the new town was named in honor of the landowner rather than of the reigning English sovereign.

In two particulars, then, the District is connected

* "A Puritan Colony in Maryland," by Daniel R. Randall, *Johns Hopkins University Studies*, Vol. IV.

† "American Presbyterianism," C. A. Briggs, New York, 1885.

with the beginnings of the denomination in this country, namely in its close proximity to some of the earliest churches and in the interests acquired here by Ninian Beall, who was such an important figure in the church history of that period. There is no record of a church having been established on the Patuxent prior to the opening of the eighteenth century, although there is reason to believe there was an organized church there in these years. The first authentic information tending to throw light on the subject is the deed, a few years ago found at Marlboro' and dated 1704, by which Ninian Beall transferred to Nathaniel Taylor, minister and others, half an acre of land on the western boundary of the Patuxent in Prince George Co. as a site for a house for the worship of God. This was the site of what was known as the Marlboro' Church. How long prior to 1704 Nathaniel Taylor had been minister there is not known. It is known that about 1699 Francis Makemie established a church in Snow Hill on the eastern shore of Maryland.

The latter had been preaching in that general locality for several years and it was due to his efforts that in 1705 the initial step towards the organization and establishment of the Presbyterian Church was taken when the first Presbytery in the United States was organized in Freehold, N. J. It is of importance in this connection to note that of seven members constituting this first Presbytery four were from Maryland. This apparent preponderance of a church in a locality where in later years it has relatively not maintained the same standing was due in the first place to the religious toleration which prevailed in Maryland where there was no effort, as was the case in Virginia and in other sections of the country, to insist upon a general conformity to the Church of England.

While Lord Baltimore, the proprietor of the colony of Maryland was a Roman Catholic, he wanted his colony settled and by substantial people, and therefore he did not undertake to exclude any by religious tests.* The great extent of the coasts of Maryland, with the numerous arms of the ocean, the bay and the rivers forming deep indentations and providing safe ports for sea-going vessels made it possible for the planters to have ready and convenient methods of transporting tobacco and other products of their plantations. Vessels could come directly up to the wharves of their farms and be loaded.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the province of Maryland contained many large land proprietors and a few sparse settlements.† As the years went on the population gradually spread out from the water fronts to settle in what was then known as the back regions. By the middle of the century this movement was well under way, and as a center for the trade of the interior country the town of Georgetown came into existence, having been preceded by such settlements as Bladensburg and Alexandria. The movement towards the back country is illustrated in a measure by the development of the Presbyterian Church. When the presbytery of Baltimore was organized in 1786, the churches of Bladensburg, Alexandria and Georgetown had pastors, while such a place as Frederick, away from the water side, was only able to support the occasional services of ministers who might be sent as supplies.

Some fifteen years after the date of Ninian Beall's gift of land for a church at Marlboro', namely in 1719,

* "Early Presbyterianism in Maryland," Rev. J. W. McIlvaine, *Johns Hopkins University Studies*, Vol. VIII.

† "Terra Mariae," Edward D. Neill, Philadelphia, 1867.

a congregation was gathered on the shores of the Eastern Branch at Bladensburg. Here came the Rev. Hugh Conn, who had four years previously arrived in this country from England. Mr. Conn continued with the Bladensburg church until the year 1752, when he died while in the pulpit.* He was succeeded by the Rev. James Hunt, who also remained with the church until his death, which occurred in 1793. In the meantime Presbyterians had evidently been increasing in numbers in this locality. A congregation was gathered at Cabin John, Md., some six miles north of Georgetown, but exactly when services were first held there it is now impossible to say. The earliest reference to this subject is found in the minutes of the Presbytery of Baltimore in the year 1787, and then it is merely the mention of Rev. Mr. Hunt as ministering in Bladensburg and Cabin John.

In Georgetown services according to the Presbyterian faith were held as early as 1780. There is no confirmation of the tradition that before there was a Presbyterian church in Georgetown, the adherents of that faith residing there were wont to attend the church on the banks of the stream then and since known as Cabin John.† The records of the Donegal Presbytery throw no light on the subject. The immediate predecessor in this locality of the Presbytery of Baltimore, the Donegal Presbytery, was organized in 1732 and continued down to the year 1786. During this entire period there is no mention either of the churches of Cabin John or Tenleytown. It is a reasonable conjecture that up to the time of the organization of the Presbytery of Bal-

* "Sketches of the Presbyterian Church in this Country Before the War of the Revolution," E. H. Gillett, *The Historical Magazine*, Vol. III., 2d Series, March, 1868.

† "The Rise, Progress and Influence of Presbyterianism in the District of Columbia, Rev. B. F. Bittinger, D.D., Washington, 1895.

timore in the year 1786 neither the work at Tenleytown nor at Cabin John had attained sufficient volume to entitle these places to a special mention in the Presbyterial records. So that no doubt Cabin John was included in "Bladensburg and neighborhood" just as Tenleytown was evidently linked in that general term with Georgetown.

Such entries as the following under date of April 12, 1780, are possibly significant:

"A supplication for Georgetown and place adjacent to be taken under the care of the Presbytery; also to have supplies sent there and particularly Mr. Stephen Balch to labor among them one year with a view to give him a call.

"A call from Georgetown and neighborhood to Mr. Stephen B. Balch promising him for his support, providing he becomes their minister, £75 in specie and 2,200 pounds of tobacco annually were also brought in."*

Presbyterian worship began in Alexandria as early as the year 1764, and a church building was erected there in 1773.

A Presbytery was organized for this region, and the first meeting was held in Baltimore, November, 1786. Its territory comprised over 5,000 square miles and extended from the Susquehanna to the Blue Ridge, with the adjacent counties of Virginia and Pennsylvania. Some of the members were separated by a distance of over one hundred miles.† Five years after the Presbytery was formed the selection was made of the location of the permanent seat of government of the United States within the bounds of the Presbytery.

Of the six pastors of churches who assisted in the organization of the Presbytery, two, namely, Rev.

* Extracts from the minutes of the Donegal Presbytery, furnished by William A. West, D.D., stated clerk of the Presbytery of Carlisle.

† "The Presbytery of Baltimore," J. P. Carter, Baltimore, 1876.

Stephen Bloomer Balch, pastor of the church in Georgetown, and Rev. Isaac S. Keith, pastor of the church in Alexandria, had pastoral charges within the limits of the new territory, while the church at Tenleytown was recorded as being without a pastor.

Then, just on the borders of the District were the churches of Bladensburg and Cabin John, of which Rev. James Hunt was pastor, and who was present at the initial meeting. It will thus be seen that the District even at that period was by no means an insignificant factor in the councils of the Presbyterian Church, covering such a wide area as that of the Presbytery of Baltimore. The church at Marlboro' had apparently died out, as the records of the Presbytery prior to 1814 contain no reference to it. At the May meeting in that year it is recorded "that the committee on the Marlboro' lot reported in part and was continued with instructions to inquire as to the plate stated to belong to the ancient church and now in use in Bladensburg."

No records of "this ancient church" have been preserved and it is not at all certain that any were kept, for it might have been in its case as in that of the Bladensburg Church, of which it was reported in 1814 that the session had kept no records since the death of their pastor, Rev. James Hunt, in 1793. Whether the latter church, as might be inferred, had records prior to that time and whether it mended its ways and thereafter committed to writing its official acts is not known, for there is now nothing of the kind in existence. There is no instance of the records of any Presbyterian Church in this District prior to the opening of the nineteenth century and for some years later having survived the vicissitudes of the years.

It is, no doubt, due to the lack of such material that

there is so much confusion and uncertainty* in regard to the beginnings of the Presbyterian Church in the City of Washington and were it not that the minutes of the Presbytery of Baltimore since its organization in the year 1786 have been preserved, it would be impossible to trace clearly and accurately the history of the church in the years preceding the organization of the First Presbyterian Church in the year 1811. For a period of sixteen years, namely from the year 1795, when the pioneer church of the Presbyterian denomination was organized in the city of Washington, down to the foundation of what is known as the First Presbyterian Church, the information is scanty, and is gleaned almost exclusively from the presbyterial records, although without the references to the early church in the newspapers of the day it would be impossible to learn its name, or to have known positively there was a church building.

A singular coincidence has undoubtedly contributed to the confusion which envelopes this period, for the first and only pastor of the pioneer church became also the first pastor of the second church organized in 1811. Rev. John Brackenridge has the distinction of having been called and ordained pastor of the Presbyterian Church in the city of Washington in the year 1795, and then sixteen years later, after this church had not been in existence for a number of years, he was called and ordained as pastor of the second church organized here, known as the First Presbyterian Church.

The career of the first Presbyterian minister who labored in the new Federal city is in several important particulars linked with the history of the city, and of some of its institutions. His remains are buried here

* "The Presbytery of Washington City and the Churches under its Care," Washington, 1888.

beside those of his wife and daughter and these are the only graves in the half acre which was reserved on his farm for the purposes of a family burying place. Marked by two plain head stones the graves are still in plain sight, from the windings of the carriage road which passes to the north of the small frame cottage which the late W. W. Corcoran occupied when he owned Harewood, now a part of the grounds of the Soldiers' Home. It is now known as the farm-house of the Home. This property was purchased from the heirs of Mr. Brackenridge by Mr. Corcoran in the year 1852. It was in a house presumably in the immediate vicinity of the family graveyard, but which is no longer standing, that Mr. Brackenridge died on the second of May, 1841, in the seventy-fifth year of his life. His wife Eleanor died in the year 1817, and as stated on her tombstone "in the 52d year of her age and the 22d of her marriage."

When twenty-three years of age Mr. Brackenridge, who was a graduate of Dickinson College at Carlisle, Pa., then under the control of the Presbyterian Church, offered himself to the Presbytery of Baltimore as a candidate for the gospel ministry. This was at the meeting in December, 1792. The usual progress of what was termed the trials of an applicant for ordination was interrupted by the ill health of Mr. Brackenridge, who was obliged to take a sea voyage, so that it was not until the spring of 1794 that he was licensed to preach, and assigned to serve at several places on given dates, among them being the second and third Sabbaths of August at the City of Washington. This is the first mention of the new city in the presbyterial records, and whether this assignment had been preceded by missionary labors on the part of Mr. Brackenridge in the new city or not, it is impossible to say.

At any rate this date of the summer of 1794 places the Presbyterian Church in the front rank in the pioneer religious work started in the new city. At that time a population had just begun to gather, for only the year before the cornerstones of the Capitol and the White House had been laid and the lines of only a few of the streets had been cut through the forests, while the erection of houses had scarcely been started. A year later the population of the city was estimated to be only 500, so that it will be perceived that the promoters of church work, as well as those identified with the material development drew largely upon the hopes of the future of what was to be the capital city of the American Republic.

Unfortunately there is no information as to the birth-place of Mr. Brackenridge or where he spent the years prior to his going to college. There is reason to believe that he was probably a resident of this general locality, for in the year 1795 he married Eleanor White, a daughter of James White, who owned a large tract of land on the brow of the hill overlooking the city in the vicinity of the Soldiers' Home and including a good portion of the present extensive grounds. Mrs. Brackenridge, who was thirty years of age at the time of her marriage, and four years the senior of her husband, was one of the noble band of ladies who organized, in the year 1815, the Washington City Orphan Asylum.

The conjecture is also a reasonable one that Mr. Brackenridge lived or labored in Virginia, for in the fall of 1794, before he had received any regular charge, he was given a call from two churches in Washington County, Va., which rather presupposes that he was personally known there. The following spring, however, before he decided on the Virginia call, he received a call, as it is stated in the minutes of Presbytery,

“from the church in the City of Washington.” The interests there had not been neglected, for after assigning Mr. Brackenridge to preach in the new city in the summer of 1794, at the fall meeting of the Presbytery, Mr. Martin, recently licensed to preach, was given a preaching appointment there for March, 1795. Mr. Brackenridge was giving consideration to those two calls, and in order that the church services might be kept up in Washington the Presbytery at the meeting in April, 1795, appointed Mr. Brackenridge to preach at the new city.

A decision was soon reached, and Mr. Brackenridge’s choice fell upon the city of Washington and he gave notice to this effect at a special meeting of the Presbytery held in the church at Bladensburg in June, 1795. As he had not as yet been ordained, arrangements were made to have that done, at a meeting to be held in the same place the following November. It was decided to ordain at the same time Mr. Knox, who had been called to the church at Bladensburg. Rev. Mr. Balch was directed to acquaint the congregation in the City of Washington with this action. Dr. Allison, of Baltimore, was appointed to preside, Dr. Muir, of Alexandria, to preach and Mr. Balch to give the charge.

“It was resolved,” continued the minutes, “to instal at the same time the newly consecrated bishops, severally, Mr. Martin at the church at State Ridge, Mr. Brackenridge at the church at the City of Washington and Mr. Knox at the church at Bladensburg.”

This program was carried out, so that on the fifteenth of November, 1795, Rev. Mr. Brackenridge was duly installed as pastor of the church in this city.

As it is evident from this record that the services of the installation of Mr. Brackenridge as pastor of the church in Washington were held in the church at

Bladensburg, it is a justifiable inference that the Washington congregation had not at that time a church building. The members of the congregation had been officially informed by Rev. Mr. Balch that the services were to take place, and as Bladensburg was at that time and continued to be up to the spring of 1801 the voting place of the election district in Prince George County, Md., of which the new city was a part, the distance separating the two places was probably not looked upon in the same light as it would be to-day. From the date of Mr. Brackenridge's installation in the fall of 1795 to the spring of 1800, a period of nearly five years, there is no official reference to the church in the new city.

In the fall of 1796 a marriage notice appeared in the *Washington Gazette* which read in part "Married on Sunday evening last by Rev. John Brackenridge, pastor of St. Andrew's Church, . . ." showing that the church had a name at that time. As to whether it had a local habitation or not, it is impossible to say. There is an account which appears to be purely traditionary, that the congregation occupied a building erected for the use of the carpenters employed on the White House and presumably in the immediate vicinity of that building. By what is undoubtedly a misapprehension of the facts this tradition has been made to apply to the early days of the First Presbyterian Church. The small number of people that assembled for church services at that time renders it not at all unlikely that following the custom of churches of other denominations in existence here at that time, the people met in private houses. The Capitol building was also used for church purposes as early as the summer of 1795,* although of course that structure was but partially built.

* *Impartial Observer*, June 19, 1795.

Some time before the spring of 1800 the congregation undoubtedly had a church building of their own, for on the sixth of May, 1800, the following notice appeared in the *Centinel of Liberty*:

“All persons holding pews in St. Andrew’s Church, city of Washington, who wish to continue them, will please inform the committee on or before the 15th day of May, and any person wishing to rent in said church for the present year may know the terms by applying to the committee.

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| “DAVID WATERSTONE, | ALEX. REED, |
| “DAVID OGLEBY, | W.M. MOFFAT, |
| “JOHN STEVENS, | JAS. MIDDLETON, |

WILLIAM KNOWLES.

“City of Washington,
“May 5, 1800. “*Com. of Arrangements.*”

The location of this church is a matter largely of conjecture. The only definite information that has come down is contained in the recollections of the city written by Christian Hines, a German citizen who gave in a small pamphlet published in the year 1865 what he was able to recall of the appearances of the city after the lapse of sixty-five years. At the time he entered upon the preparation of this work he had reached the age of eighty-five, and he had only the aid of his memory. Such a record, of course, must be accepted with due allowance for the well-known fallibility of the human memory. Mr. Hines states that

“in the square bounded by F and G, Tenth and Eleventh Streets (there were in the year 1800) three frame houses . . . the other (a one-story round top) was a Presbyterian Church or meeting house. This and St. Patrick’s Church, which stood opposite each other, were the only public places of worship between Rock Creek and the Capitol . . . St. Patrick’s Church, a small, one and a half story frame house.”

In another part of his narrative Mr. Hines speaks of G Street and says:

“One of the first houses on that street that I recollect of was the old one-story round top frame meeting house where (it is said) Rev. Mr. Brackenridge used to preach.”

As Mr. Hines is entirely accurate in the statement that those were the only churches in the territory described and also as to the location of St. Patrick’s Church, it seems highly probable that he was not mistaken in describing the site of St. Andrew’s Church, especially as he makes two references to it. A statement which is given some publicity, but which is evidently traditionary, attributes to the generosity of David Burnes the loan of the lot on which the building was located. Mr. Burnes owned lots in that square, some of them fronting on G Street, but beyond that there is no known evidence in support of this alleged interest in the early Presbyterian Church in the Federal City.

Mr. Peter Lenox was the owner of a lot in the square referred to by Mr. Hines, which adjoined on the east the lot at the southeast corner of Eleventh and G Streets, and as he was a Presbyterian it seems more probable that he gave that much encouragement to the infant church, rather than Mr. Burnes, who had other denominational affiliations.

Further details both in regard to the church building and the church itself are extremely meagre. A year after the announcement appeared about the renting of the pews, namely on June 19, 1801, a notice was printed in the *Intelligencer* that the Federal Lodge of Masons would celebrate St. John’s Day by attending services “at the Presbyterian meeting house near the hotel.” The latter reference is undoubtedly to the Great Hotel

on E Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets, northwest. Another year elapsed and from the same source it is learned that on May 31, 1802, a meeting of the inhabitants was to be held at "the Presbyterian meeting house to nominate six men to represent the western division of the city in the council." There is no further allusion either in the newspapers or elsewhere to the church building and from that date it drops as completely out of mention as if it had never existed. Nine years later, when another Presbyterian church was organized, a location was selected on Capitol Hill, where a building was erected. Who those men and women were who constituted this early church is now only a subject of conjecture. The names of the members of the committee appended to the newspaper notice are the only ones that have come down to us. Of these seven men but little is known. David Watterston, as the name was subsequently spelled, was a native of Jedburg, Scotland, and came to this city in the year 1791 and was employed on the Capitol Building. When he died on the 22d day of February, 1823, in the seventieth year of his age, he had been a resident of the city for thirty-two years, and was spoken of in the *Intelligencer* as one of the oldest inhabitants of Washington. His son, George Watterston, was for a number of years the Librarian of Congress. In connection with Robert Speiden, he opened a marble yard near the Capitol in the summer of 1799, the firm describing themselves in an advertisement in the *Centinel of Liberty* as stone cutters from Edinburgh.

After a lapse of one year came the announcement of the dissolution of the partnership, Mr. Watterston retiring from the firm. As to Mr. William Knowles, the only thing known about him is that his name appears in the list of members of Federal Lodge of Masons for

the year 1794. Undoubtedly during the early years in the history of the city the population was constantly changing, as the newcomers tried their fortunes and then moved to other fields of activity. This was no doubt due in part to the falling off in the demand for the services of artisans, as the public buildings were completed and many of this class who had been attracted to the new city by the chance of finding employment went to other localities. Then, too, many who had come with high hopes of the rapid material development of the new town had met not merely disappointment but also financial losses and they had gone elsewhere.

In spite of these circumstances, however, the population steadily increased in numbers, even before the public offices were removed from Philadelphia. As has been stated the inhabitants were estimated to number in the year 1794 about 500. Three years later it was computed there were 2,000 souls in the new place, while the United States census enumerators in the summer of 1800, after the removal of the government employees, found the population to number 3,210. Again in 1803 the population was thought to be 5,000, and at the next census decade in 1810 the city was given the credit of a population of 8,208.

The gathering of a congregation and the establishing of a church on a firm basis could not have been an easy task in these first years of the infant city and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church did not long survive the difficulties that beset it and these were apparently internal as well as external. After the church had been in existence six years it is recorded in the proceedings of the meeting of presbytery of April 2, 1801, that "The presbytery having received information that some differences had arisen between Mr. Brackenridge

and his society and that want of health had prevented his officiating for some time past" Mr. Brackenridge was notified to attend the next meeting and explain the situation. The ministers in the vicinity were requested to supply his pulpit when they could conveniently do so, if Mr. Brackenridge's indisposition should continue.

It was not until the spring meeting of 1802 that Mr. Brackenridge appeared before the presbytery and then he explained that he had been prevented by ill health from exercising the functions of his office. He requested that the pastoral relations be dissolved. This request was granted and a supply was provided for the church in Washington in connection with the one at Bladensburg. The lack of a call to another minister in the new city points very clearly to the actual condition of the church, and therefore it is not surprising that after an interval of four years, during which the presbyterial records are silent as to the church, it is recorded at the meeting in 1806 that the committee on supplies were given particular instructions "to revive the congregation in the City of Washington and provide it with as many supplies as possible." In the meantime Mr. Brackenridge seems to have regained his health, for in 1805, three years after he ceased to be pastor of the church, he began the service of supply at Bladensburg that continued with some interruption down to his death.

Internal dissension is not alone sufficient to account for the lack of success in this first church effort of the Presbyterian denomination, for if that had been the real cause some traces would have been left, in all likelihood, on the records of the Presbytery. It is natural to suppose that establishing another Presbyterian Church in the same locality had some influence upon the fortunes of the older church. That event was prac-

tically coincident with the coming of the government employees from Philadelphia to Washington in June, 1800. Some of these newcomers, while living in Philadelphia, were members and attendants of the Associated Reformed Church, one of the several branches of the denomination. Perhaps the most influential was Mr. Joseph Nourse, who held the important office of Register of the Treasury. Closely following the exodus from Philadelphia came ministers who were sent by the Associated Reformed Presbytery of Philadelphia to conduct services in the new city.

Under their auspices services were begun in the fall of 1800,* the expense being defrayed by subscriptions made by residents of the city who were interested in encouraging this movement. In a little more than two years a more decided step was felt to be justified, and so at the beginning of the year 1803 a meeting was publicly called to be held in the hall of the Treasury building, where it is presumed the usual Sunday services were held, for the purpose of ascertaining what support was available for a stated ministry.†

As a result a call was issued to Rev. James Laurie, which was accepted, and a pastorate was begun which continued for half a century. Four years later, due in part to the efforts of Rev. Dr. Laurie, who traveled throughout the country soliciting funds,‡ the congregation was able to enter into a church building which had been erected on a site on F Street, now a part of the ground covered by the new Willard Hotel. There is a tradition that some time during the period from the calling of a pastor to the erection of a church building (1803-1807) a frame structure located at the southwest

* *Intelligencer*, October 18, 1800; *Centinel of Liberty*, November 18, 1800.

† *Intelligencer*, January 19, 1803.

‡ "The American Pulpit, Presbyterian," W. B. Sprague.

corner of Fourteenth and F Streets was occupied for church purposes.* The official city records, however, show that in 1803 a building of some consequence for those days was on the lot in question, which would rather tend to throw doubt on the accuracy of this tradition.

While the F Street Church was thus getting established the efforts of the Presbytery to revive St. Andrew's Church were unavailing. There is no evidence that any further attempt was made in that direction after the year 1806. It was perhaps then recognized that one church of the denomination in the section of the city that might be generally described as lying between the President's House and the Capitol was sufficient, for although that section soon began to develop into the principal business and residential part of the city, yet no other Presbyterian church was started in that general locality until the year 1820, when the Second Church erected a building on the site where the edifice of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church now stands.

From the isolated bits of information which have come down to us relating to the Presbyterian Church, it is evident there was quite a Presbyterian population on Capitol Hill. A year after the F Street Church was organized, namely in May, 1804, a call was issued for a meeting at Stelle's Hotel, Capitol Hill, of those willing to contribute to the support of a Presbyterian church. As far as known nothing came of this meeting, if one was held, but this date may be assigned as the beginning of what was some seven years later the First Presbyterian Church. It is likely services under Presbyterian auspices were held at this period on Capitol Hill,

* "The Centennial of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church," Washington, 1904, p. 19.

even though a church organization was not formed. Still this is purely a matter of conjecture, as nothing has been preserved of such a movement. It is known, however, as soon as the Capitol building was sufficiently far advanced to be used, that it was the custom to hold religious services on Sunday in that structure, conducted by ministers of various denominations who happened to be available. Among those who often officiated on such occasions was Rev. Robert Elliot. He served for a number of years as principal of the public school in the eastern section of the city known as the Eastern Academy in distinction from the one in the western section called the Western Academy. In the fall of 1810 Mr. Elliott applied to the Baltimore Presbytery to be received as probationer but no final action was reached.

As the school house was used for public gatherings, it is likely Mr. Elliott exercised his gifts as a preacher on Sundays in the school room when a place in the Capitol building was not available. It is possible that it is these meetings which gave rise to the tradition that in its early days the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church met in that place.* At that time Academy East was located on East Capitol Street, probably between First and Second Streets.

There is no evidence that Mr. Brackenridge had professional employment for three years after his retirement from the pastorate of St. Andrew's Church, and it is probable his delicate health afforded sufficient reason for his withdrawal from active duties. In addition he was a man of considerable means, and was no doubt obliged to give attention to his private affairs. In this

* "A Historical Discourse on the Re-dedication of the Edifice of The First Presbyterian Church," Rev. Byron Sunderland, D.D., Washington, 1892.

respect Mr. Brackenridge was in all likelihood, then, as he would be to-day, rather an exception among his ministerial brethren. There were, however, in those days men who carried on large business enterprises and at the same time performed the duties of a minister. Rev. Mr. Makemie had extensive business interests and so had Rev. Mr. Davis, who was a successful preacher in Virginia and Delaware.

A more common experience in the life of the average pastor was the endeavor to supply the deficiency in his salary through other sources than his professional calling. Rev. Dr. Laurie, the pastor of the F Street Church, held a clerkship in the Treasury Department; Rev. Dr. Balch, of Georgetown, in 1794, organized the Georgetown Academy. Rev. Mr. Hunt, while preaching at Bladensburg and Cabin John, also conducted a school at his farm Tusculum, near Rockville, Md. The most famous of his scholars was William Wirt, a poor orphan boy, who rose to become Attorney-General of the United States, and eminent in law and literature. Rev. Mr. Brackenridge, in 1809, while preaching at Bladensburg, founded the Rockville Academy, but it is not likely that it was on account of any personal pecuniary consideration but that rather it was in line with his policy of encouraging the spread of education.

At the meeting of the Presbytery in the fall of 1805 Mr. Brackenridge was appointed to supply the churches at Bladensburg and Cabin John. It is also probable that he gave his services, when the opportunity occurred, to the people on Capitol Hill, for it is conjectured that preaching there was not discontinued. Finally, in the spring of 1809 a petition was received from Presbyterians in and about the Navy Yard in regard to procuring the services of a Presbyterian minister. In its answer the Presbytery reminded the peti-

tioners that for six months in the preceding summer, supplies had been furnished them, and now if they signified a desire to enrol themselves a minister would be sent as requested. This suggestion, intimating that a church organization had been unnecessarily delayed, was evidently complied with, and Mr. Brackenridge was designated to serve as missionary in Washington. Such an appointment was a new one in Presbyterian experience, as it was stated it was made under an order of the last general assembly permitting the Presbytery to appoint missionaries. The services of Mr. Brackenridge were so successful that by May, 1810, the Presbytery appointed Rev. Mr. LeGrand for the purpose of collecting "a Presbyterian congregation in the City of Washington near the Navy Yard and to establish the church at Bladensburg."

It is probable that Mr. LeGrand did not accept this appointment, for at the next meeting of the Presbytery in October, 1810, Mr. Brackenridge was appointed a stated supply to the City of Washington and Bladensburg "till our next meeting." The arrangement was that he should devote two-thirds of his time to the former and one-third to the latter place. It was further stipulated, and this shows the importance with which the Washington charge was regarded, that the committee on supplies should procure supplies for the time that Mr. Brackenridge should be at Bladensburg.

This arrangement was continued at the meeting in the spring of 1811, and by the fall of the following year such progress had been made that the congregation sent a committee to Presbytery seeking instructions as to how to proceed in giving a call to Mr. Brackenridge. As an indication of the change that was going on in this locality, at the same meeting a request was received from the Bladensburg church for the services of Mr.

Brackenridge for one Sabbath in three. Ten or fifteen years prior to that time, when the pioneer church was being started in the new city, the church at Bladensburg ranked third in the list of churches in the Baltimore Presbytery in the amount of contributions to one of the church funds.

The condition of the new Washington congregation was evidently a prosperous one, for at the same time a committee was sent to Presbytery, arrangements had been made for the purchase of lot 13, Square 636, at the southwest corner of South Capitol and B Streets, and in a little more than a year later, namely June, 1812, a church building was erected on that site and public notice was given of "the distribution of pews in the First Presbyterian Church, Washington city." Following the usual course the Presbytery appointed Rev. Mr. McIver, who came to Washington and presided over a meeting of the congregation when a call was given to Rev. Mr. Brackenridge. This was in the spring of 1812, and at the session of the Presbytery in the following fall Rev. Mr. McIver informed that body he had moderated a call of the Washington congregation to Mr. Brackenridge, which he presented to Presbytery, and which was then placed in the hands of the newly chosen pastor.

At the request of Mr. Brackenridge, Presbytery directed that the existing arrangements with the churches at Washington and Bladensburg should be continued until the next meeting to be held May 11, 1813. Mr. Elias B. Caldwell, a ruling elder of the congregation of Washington city was admitted to a seat. Mr. Caldwell had the distinction of being the first elder whose name is on record as representing a Washington church in the Presbytery. The next session of the Presbytery was held in Washington and was the first assemblage

of that body in the capital city. May 11, 1813, was the day, and no doubt the sessions were held in the new church which in later years came to have the name of "the little white church under the hill." It was at this time that Mr. Brackenridge announced his acceptance of the call to be pastor of the church.

The afternoon of the first Sabbath of July was designated as the time for his installation. Rev. Dr. Muir, of Alexandria, was appointed to preach the sermon, Rev. Dr. Balch, of Georgetown, to preside and Rev. Mr. Martin to deliver the charge. This program was duly carried out, and as it happened the exercises were held on the anniversary of the nation's birth.

The services of that day closed the initial period in the history of the Presbyterian Church in the District. That the preceding narrative contains a sketch somewhat at large of the pioneer organization is due to circumstances rather than to choice. The original purpose was to describe the conditions which led to organized work in the District on the part of the Presbyterian Church and how that work was undertaken. Soon after the search for materials was fairly entered upon it was discovered that a church had existed in the District concerning which there was no positive mention in any of the printed historical accounts that has come to the writer's notice. It seemed, therefore, fitting that, as far as possible, the facts about this apparently lost pioneer church should be made known. However, the original purpose, it is hoped, has not been entirely lost sight of and from these pages may be gathered some idea of the situation in and about the District as it appeared to members of the Presbyterian Church in the closing years of the eighteenth century and in the beginning of the nineteenth.